

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

APRIL 2009

FOUR DOLLARS



The Merrimac Partnership



Turkey Talk



Unexpected Harvests



Commonwealth of Virginia
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HUNTING & FISHING LICENSE FEES

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Bob Duncan

Executive Director



April heralds the fine tradition of spring gobbler season. We're so blessed; turkey numbers are generally up in most areas of the state. Maybe part of the thrill is just the sheer excitement of getting outdoors again, enjoying longer periods of daylight after being shut down by winter's darkness.

As Ken Perrotte's story illustrates, gobbler antics can leave the most ardent hunter scratching his head, but most will admit—under pressure, perhaps—that gobbler chasing is absolutely *thrilling* and so very rewarding when successful.

I suspect that most of us started out gobbler hunting by tagging along with someone who knew what they were doing! And maybe that particular someone called in a bird for us. Unfortunately, my first attempt was self-introduced (and the frustration, self-inflicted). My poor calling skills were exceeded only by my lack of knowledge about the 'art' of the hunt. Indeed, it was to be many years before I decided to take up the sport again.

The second time around, an experienced turkey hunter called in my first gobbler and I was hooked! I remain so today, and like many others, I anticipate another fine spring in Virginia's gobbler woods.

There is something very special about the camaraderie among turkey

hunters, who seem to truly enjoy each other's successes and experiences. And spending time afield with others is one of the surest ways to expand your knowledge of the bird and hone your hunting skills. Teaming up with a hunting buddy is a great way to pursue a tough old gobbler. If you have already tagged out, for instance, you can extend your season by

calling one in for a partner.

What I find most satisfying, however, is the opportunity to introduce others to this fantastic sport. Consider tapping into our convenient apprentice hunter license to take someone out new to hunting, or invite an older hunter who has not yet tried his hand at turkey hunting. Every chance to pass along this fine tradition is time well spent, in my book.

I would be remiss if I did not confess that some of my lost, or busted, opportunities afield—while quite disappointing and humbling at the time—have contributed much to my love of this most special game bird. Because of them, I appreciate even more those occasions when things go right and Murphy is not along for the ride.

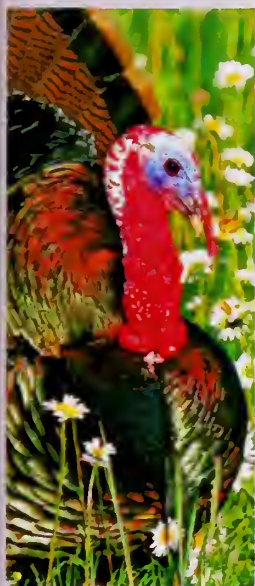
Here's hoping that you continue your education and enjoy a safe, rewarding time in pursuit of old tom!

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; To provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; To promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; To provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

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photo ©John R. Ford



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©Marc McGlade

Blue Cat

The mighty and historic James River is home to the state-record blue catfish. There's more where that came from.

By Marc N. McGlade

Catfish the size of large dogs are common in catfish-rich waters. Nothing could better describe the tidal stretch of the James River—Central Virginia's current record-holder for blue catfish.

Of course, there are many more species to pursue in this majestic river, but presently an angler would be hard pressed to find a body of water anywhere in the country more

productive for catching 20- to 70-pound blues.

And that's no fish story.

Catfish anglers and largemouth bass addicts vie for the most attention from Richmond to points southeast on the big waterway. Virginia has a storied past of promoting and hosting the biggest bass tournaments of them all. Among them, Richmond and the James River hosted the Wal-Mart FLW Tour Championship in 2003. The eventual winner, Lynchburg native David Dudley, put

As the James winds its way through marshes and history, anglers continue to try their best to beat the state-record blue catfish. The record has fallen quite a few times in recent years, and based on input from fisheries biologists with the Department (DGIF), it makes sense that this current record will be eclipsed by another monster "whiskerfish."

Blue Cat Facts

Barbels, or whiskers, make catfish easily identifiable to novice anglers. Taste buds pepper these whiskers, which help the bottom dwellers locate food. Catfish feed primarily by their sense of smell and taste.

Like the channel cat, blue catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) have a deeply forked tail. Other names for them are fork-tailed catfish, humpback, and chucklehead.

Blue cats favor fish, crayfish, and mollusks. However, as blue catfish grow, if forage fish are abundant (as they are in the James River), they make a switch from bottom feeding to active predation. Blue cats will even chase gizzard shad and other forage onto flats in search of prey.



The James River is a popular destination for boaters and anglers.

Above: Circle hooks help with catch-and-release fishing and rarely harm the fish. **Page 4:** Mike Atkinson, a James River catfishing expert, hoists a trophy blue cat he caught near Hopewell.

©Dwight Dyke



\$500,000 in his pocket courtesy of winning the first-place prize. At the time, that was the largest payday for a championship event in the history of competitive bass fishing. That wasn't the only championship to occur along the banks of the James. Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (BASS) held their championship event, the BASS Masters Classic, three consecutive years on the tidally influenced river from 1988 to 1990. There are now serious catfish tournaments that take place on the river, as well.

Central

©Marc McGlade



Blue cats favor fish, crayfish, and mollusks.

"Large blue catfish prefer deep channels and gravitate to areas such as sunken barges, old pier pilings, or downed trees in the channel or adjacent to channel drop-offs," said Bob Greenlee, a fisheries biologist with the Department. "Blue catfish can be classified as generalists, which are well adapted and feed on what is abundant."

The State Record

The state-record resident from the tidal James is impressive. On June 15, 2006, Archie Gold caught a massive blue cat weighing 95 pounds, 11 ounces.

Blue catfish weighing 30 pounds or measuring 38 inches in length qualify for a trophy fish certificate from the DGIF. Clearly, this beast of a kitty cat met the mark.

According to Greenlee, "The James River population has yet to come to 'equilibrium,' approximately 35 years after the initial stockings in the 1973 to 1975 timeframe."

He says this introduced population continues to expand its distribution within the James River system and continues to increase in density in the freshwater tidal section of the main stem and major tributaries. Additionally, the upper limit of the size distribution continues to increase.

"The first 50-pound blue cat was not reported from the James until 1996," Greenlee explained. "For the past several years we have had over 100 citations issued annually for blue cats over 50 pounds caught in the James or its tributaries. The upper end of the catch has increased by a 10-pound increment every three years or so."

The biologist points out that anglers can expect the James to continue to produce 90-plus-pound fish in the near term. He adds that the potential for 100-plus pounders in the James indeed exists!

"The James will eventually reach equilibrium, or some cyclic movement around a population level plateau," Greenlee said. "It is unknown when this will occur, and what the ramifications will be. The James is a very productive river system."

The obvious question: Why does this incredible river continue to provide a trophy fishery? Greenlee explains there is no indication of a reduction in gizzard shad abundance. Gizzard shad are the primary forage for large blue cats in the James.

"There is a significant amount of commercial harvest of small, fillet-sized blue cats from the tidal James system," Greenlee stated, "and this removal of biomass may be contributing to sustained growth rates."

The Big Picture

Greenlee says the tidal James equals big, blue catfish. He would be surprised if there isn't another state-record blue cat swimming around in the river right now.



Above and below: Big baits such as shad are the ticket for fooling giant blue catfish in the James River.



Greenlee feels compelled to mention an additional angle on the tidal James.

"That would be the outstanding crappie fishing available to anglers," he said. "The main stem tidal James and its tidal tributaries are home to an outstanding crappie population. There is an abundance of 12- to 14-inch crappies. These fish are in excellent condition and weigh in the 1- to 1.5-pound range."

They're Willing and Waiting

Centrally located in the commonwealth lies the state's best water for blue catfish. However, as noted by Greenlee, there is more to the story than kitty cats. Anglers owe it to themselves to come to the mighty James and sample numerous other fish offerings. □

Marc N. McGlade is a writer and photographer from Midlothian who enjoys fishing for a variety of Virginia's fish species, including trophy blue cats in the James River.

For More Information

- For fisheries information and regulations regarding the James River, contact the DGIF Region I office in Charles City at (804) 829-6580. More information can be found online at www.HuntFish-VA.com.
- Several public boat ramps are available for anglers to use. Visit the Department's Web site for all of your boating access needs.
- James River regulations: possession of one blue catfish 32 inches or longer per person, per day. There is no limit on harvest of blue catfish smaller than 32 inches from Virginia's tidal rivers.
- The Virginia Department of Health has a consumption advisory on the James River that states no one should consume blue catfish 32 inches or longer, and no more than two meals per month for fish less than 32 inches.

"As far as other species go, it is possible the James could produce a state-record yellow perch, long-nose gar, or bowfin," he said. "It's very unlikely the James, or any other tidal river system, will produce a state-record largemouth bass. A 5-pound largemouth is big for tidal rivers, and the extreme upper end is somewhere around 8 pounds."

In 2000, the Department conducted an angler and creel survey of the tidal James system. There was a 50-50 split between largemouth bass fishing pressure and catfish (blue cat) fishing pressure.

"The James is a regional draw for bass tournament anglers," Greenlee said, "however, anglers from around the country are traveling to Virginia to fish for trophy blue cats. Many of these anglers are spending vacation time and money in and around the Richmond and Williamsburg areas, paying guides to give them an opportunity to catch 50-plus-pound blue cats."

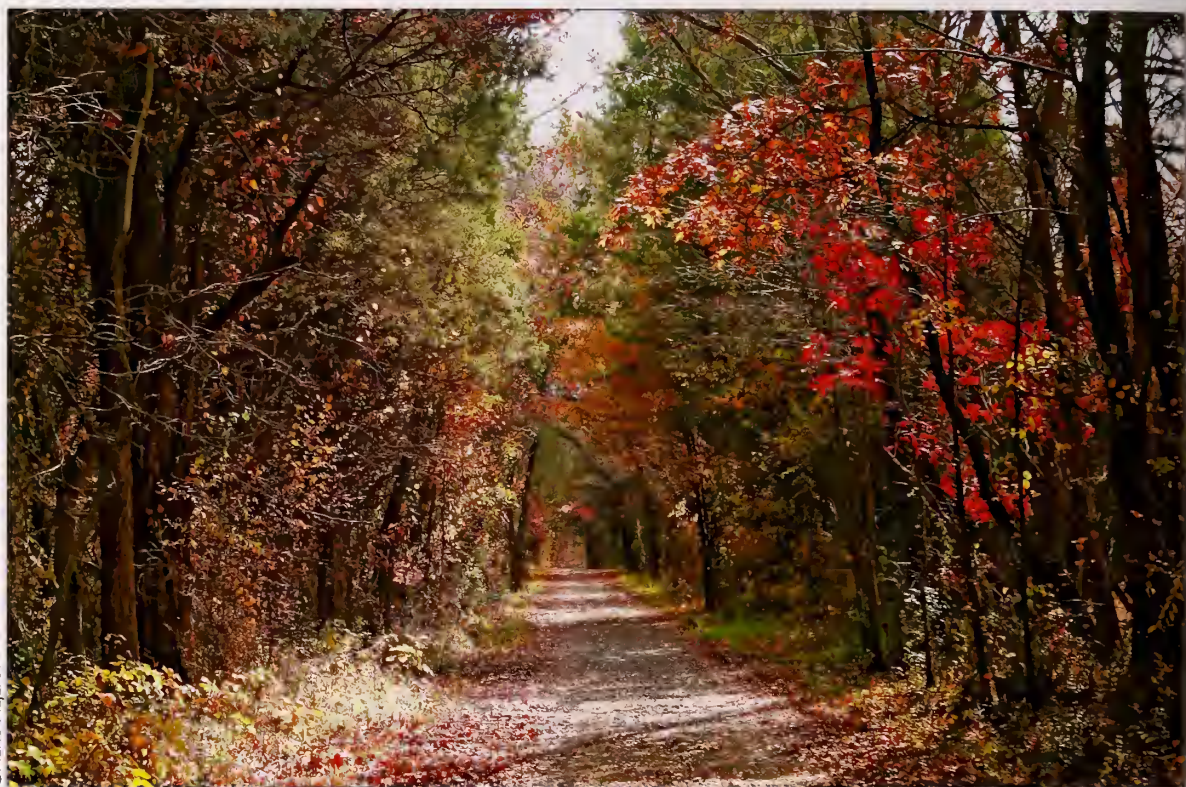


Above: Duck blinds like this one are sure bets for chunky largemouth at the James River. **Below:** Most large-scale bass tournaments at the James River launch from Osborne Landing—a top-notch boating facility in Henrico County.





A STEWARD LE



Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area

By Marie Majarov

“Stewardship Forest.” The simple logo on the faded signpost at the north entrance to the Department’s newest Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Merrimac Farm, eloquently reflects the dreams, pride, and legacy of the late owner, renowned Prince William County conservation visionary, Marine Col. Dean Noyes McDowell. Also the spirit of the McDowell children, Prince William Conservation Alliance (PWCA), the U.S. Marine Corps, and DGIF, all of whom in a

partnership characterized by initiative, persistence, and commitment to open space conservation made the preservation of these 302 magnificent acres a reality to be celebrated.

The property, which features wetlands, hardwood forests, and upland meadows that connect the Cedar Run wetland bank with the forested buffer area of the Marine Corps Base at Quantico, forms an impressive continuous land tract that protects sensitive habitats, wildlife, and watershed values near the most densely populated hub of business and development in our commonwealth.

Located in Nokesville, Merrimac Farm is the 37th in the Department’s statewide array of WMAs, now totaling 200,000-plus preserved acres, and has the distinction of being the northernmost property and closest to a major urban area. Purchased by Col. McDowell in 1959, the original records date back to 1737. “Mac,” as the Colonel was nicknamed, and wife Mary built a lovely farmhouse for their family, renovated an old stone house on the property, established a kennel for the friendly, energetic Brittany’s that were his pride and joy, and affectionately named their slice of heaven “Merrimac.”

SHIP LEGACY



©Marie Majarov

Dean McDowell was very proud when he earned his Stewardship Forest sign from DOF; the partners have kept it standing in his memory.

Col. McDowell actively managed his farm for birds, especially bobwhite quail, and other wildlife, and created a popular, licensed shooting preserve for sportsmen. Qualifying for his "stewardship" sign from the Virginia Department of Forestry was momentous to him and a step toward his dream of placing the property in the hands of the DGIF to ensure its permanent conservation. But sadly in 2002, without the legal provisions in place, his untimely death made this beautiful parcel a highly sought-after target for development.



©Marie Majarov

The partners, whose hard work and determination made the preservation of Merrimac Farm a reality. **Back row left to right:** Charlie Grymes, Chairman of the Board PWCA, Jerry Sims, Regional Wildlife Manager DGIF; James Hazel, Board of Directors DGIF; Kim Hosen, Executive Director PWCA; Colonel Charles A. Dallachie, Commander MCBQ; Bob Duncan, Executive Director DGIF; and Chuck Rushing, Director of Facilities MCBQ. **Front row left to right:** Ron Hughes, Wildlife Lands Manager DGIF; Michael Law, Associate Counsel, MCBQ; and Paul Stewart, Realty Specialist, Headquarters Marine Corps.

The Partnership

Having been well taught the value of stewardship by their dad, the McDowell children wanted Merrimac to become an enduring legacy for their parents, but it looked to be a difficult, perhaps unattainable, undertaking. With PWCA, a non-profit organization of local conservation-minded citizens, the DGIF, and representatives from the neighboring Marine Corps base, they began a tedious 5-year process of negotiation and planning. An active partnership developed "... so committed to a common goal, working and struggling together even when the going became incredibly tough and stressful," described PWCA executive director Kim Hosen, whose role in the process everyone agrees was critical, "that it was unlike any I have participated in and can serve as a valuable prototype for other conservation projects in Prince William County and throughout Virginia."

June 13, 2007, a major milestone: PWCA was awarded a Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) grant by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation that was matched by DGIF. The Marine Corps generously contributed major funding via the Department of the Navy's *Federal Military Encroachment Partnering Program* that works with govern-

ment entities, conservation organizations, and willing landowners to support conservation efforts for lands that border military installations. With all three funding sources in place, DGIF was finally able to purchase the McDowell property. A permanent restrictive easement was established protecting the existing borders of the Marine Corps base from incompatible development that could impact current or future military operations—also protecting the McDowell's legacy forever.

Success! "An outstanding example of the value of partnership ...



©John Ford

Habitats and Their Protection



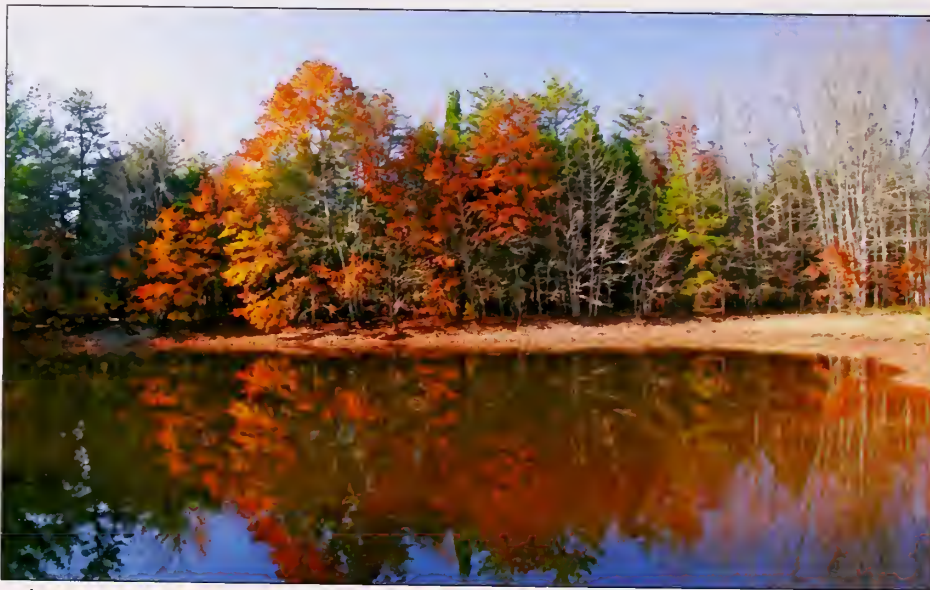
The lovely farmhouse built by Dean and Mary McDowell.

©Marie Majarov

The property's southern portion includes 155 acres of floodplain forests and wetlands with frontage on Cedar Run: Those acres filter the water flowing into the Occoquan Reservoir, a source of water supply to Northern Virginia. Bottomland hardwoods in this area include pin oak, green ash, black walnut, slippery elm, sycamore, sweet gum, and red maple, surrounded by dazzling Virginia bluebells. Nearby, the old stone house is being refurbished by PWCA as a welcome/nature center.

A mature oak-hickory forest graces the northern and western reaches of Merrimac. This outstanding upland forest community, along with the bluebells and other spring wildflowers, has been designated as a Virginia Native Plant Society registry site. DGIF wildlife biologist John Rohm will reside on-site, taking on active management of Merrimac's splendid habitats. In this regard, regional wildlife manager Jerry Sims proudly describes Merrimac Farm as "...a model for public lands, demonstrating that good wildlife management practices can be achieved within urban and suburban settings."

Management efforts will begin in the central section, where early-succession habitat helps support woodcock, songbirds, raptors, wild turkey, quail, and rabbits by providing food, nesting, and cover for escape, brooding, loafing, and roosting, according to wildlife lands manager Ron Hughes. This area would be tragically lost to changes in vegetation within 20 years without the rapid and continued intervention that is planned. Hughes will use prescribed burning as a major tool to eliminate fescue and encourage the growth of native seed stock like blazing star, sneezeweed, coneflowers, goldenrods and milkweeds embedded in the rich soil. Managing the red cedar to prevent overgrowth, and encouraging the rich native grasses at Merrimac also will be vital. Aspirations include restoring the bright red barn for nature education groups.



©Marie Majarov

A 1.5-acre pond graces the scenic Merrimac Farm and provides good fishing opportunities.

without which it could not have happened," asserted Jimmy Hazel, DGIF board member actively involved in the endeavor. Quantico Base Commander Colonel Charles Dallachie ardently echoed this sentiment, affirming that the Marine Corps looks forward to opportunities to partner again in the acquisition and conservation of other properties.

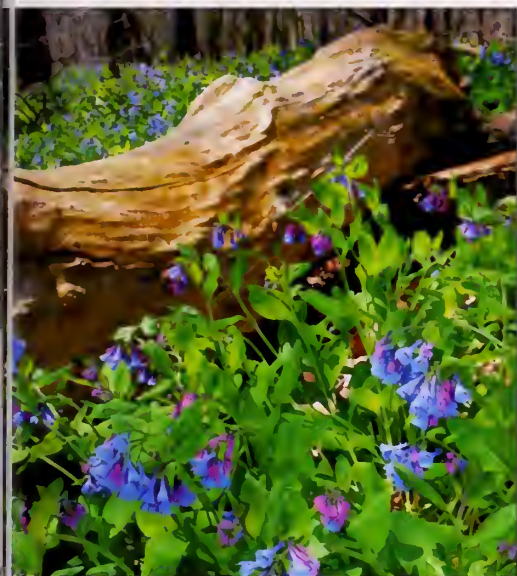
In January 2008 the transfer was complete. With boundaries marked

and facilities developed by DGIF staff, along with cleanup help contributed by PWCA, the goal of opening the property to the public for hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and outdoor education was quickly realized on March 31, 2008. A dedication ceremony and celebration recognizing this unique partnership's achievements was held last April amid the majestic glow of the property's large stand of Virginia bluebells.



©Marie Majarov

Merrimac Farm's early-succession habitat provides critical cover, food, and safe travel.



Lee Walker

The woodlands of Merrimac erupt in color with the arrival of the spring bluebells.

Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife Activities

In all seasons Merrimac Farm radiates beauty, color, and interesting wildlife. The partners take pride in planning for different, simultaneous activities: Bird watching, nature photography, observing butterflies, hunting, fishing, trapping, canoeing, and studying amphibians and rep-

tiles in the floodplain, to name a few, are all available.

Multi-species and spring turkey hunting is by permit only, issued through a quota system. Taking bobwhite quail is banned, however, to promote the recovery of this severely declining species. Fishing, enjoying waterfowl, and canoeing possibilities at the pond and Cedar Run are excellent. Mapping of habitats and detailed species lists for the property are being prepared in cooperation with the PWCA. To maintain habitat integrity, horseback riding, bicycling, using all-terrain vehicles, picnicking, and dog walking are prohibited.

PWCA is engaged in establishing myriad educational activities. Ms. Hosen notes an April 11 Bluebell Festival, a Christmas bird count (87 species recorded last year), a master naturalist chapter, a monitored bluebird-box trail, weekend tours, and a series of ex-



©Marie Majarov

Kim Hosen shows a visitor the winter scenery near where the bluebells bloom.

citing programs demonstrating that, "You don't have to visit a rainforest or huge wilderness area to see cool critters.... amazing animals can be found right here in Northern Virginia." One of PWCA's most rewarding programs based at Merrimac Farm is the Chesapeake Bay Field Study Program, a hands-on nature study of local ecosystems that supports the Virginia Science Standards of Learning.

DGIF executive director Bob Duncan applauds this first acquisition of its kind, particularly, "... the numerous prospects it offers for outreach in Northern Virginia to encourage awareness and appreciation of nature, so important in this day and time." Wildlife manager Sims articulated it succinctly: "If you like wildlife, come to Merrimac Farm." Here, a legacy of environmental stewardship and wildlife conservation has been preserved for Dean and Mary McDowell. □

Marie Majarov and her husband Milan are members of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association. Living in Winchester, Virginia both are Clinical Psychologists as well as avid nature enthusiasts; they can be reached thru www.majarov.com.

For More Information:

Prince William Conservation Alliance: www.pwconserve.org. A beautiful, informative Web site covering Merrimac, its wildlife, Bluebell Festival, and educational activities.

Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping: www.HuntFishVA.com. Information on the Quota System at Merrimac, and opportunities for hunting and fishing at the neighboring Marine Corps Base, Quantico.



©John Ford

Turkey T

*April is not just
spring flowers and
warmer weather.
To many, it means
being outdoors and
talking turkey.*

By Ken Perrotte

“**W**hat’s the appeal of spring turkey hunting,” asked a non-hunting relative? “I can buy turkey for 49 cents a pound.”

True enough. You can buy domestic turkey, but you have to *earn* a wild turkey and the tougher the effort, the greater the satisfaction when you’re walking from the woods with that gobbler slung over your shoulder.

Describing the peak experiences to a non-hunter can also be a challenge.

First, sneak into a promising hunting area in the pre-dawn and listen for a bird to gobble on the roost.

Then, quietly try to slip in close enough to get the turkey’s interest with a hen call.

After the bird flies down at daybreak, it will rarely approach as planned, often hanging up unseen out of gun range or circling to whatever side will give you the most difficult shot.

You twist your completely camouflaged body into something resembling an offbeat yoga position; then, try to hold completely motionless for at least 15 minutes past the point where your butt gets numb and your arm and shoulder muscles start twitching. Your heart pounds in anticipation. You’re practically hyper-

ventilating, but you resist grabbing a big gulp of air because it might create discernible movement. Now, ratchet up the degree of difficulty with mosquitoes buzzing around your eyes and ears, occasionally giving you their own tiny needle sticks through whatever mesh face mask you’re wearing.

This scene often marks the beginning of the conclusion to a relationship you started a short while earlier with this amorous tom. It heralds the desired outcome following hours of practicing with the assorted calls you carry in your specially-configured turkey hunting vest. It shows you’ve learned from mistakes made in previous hunts.

If you can successfully maintain complete stealth when a mature tom turkey just 15 yards away thunders a gobble that shakes needles off the pine trees ... if you can maintain poise when he appears in full strut, his head shining white-blue like a 100-watt bulb in the early morning light ... if you can skillfully adjust your body and shotgun in ultra slow motion to avoid detection by the revved-up, yet always wary, bird ... well, you just might close the deal.

Too often, though, the gobbler drops out of his puffed-up strut, his head color changes white to red in a second, and he skedaddles before



©Tommy Kirkland

you get a shot. At those moments, you rip away your face mask, suck in that big breath of air, shake your head, and mutter. Something went wrong. You'll replay it over in your head a hundred times trying to figure out what happened.

Yup, that's spring turkey hunting.

Ultimate Interaction

The eastern wild turkey, *Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*, is frequently cited as one of the most challenging to hunt of the various North American subspecies.

Gary Norman has more than 20 years of experience as the Department's turkey biologist. Besides managing the turkey program, he manages small game and furbearer species.

Norman said Virginia's hunters have benefited from turkey population expansion through a very successful restoration program. Most areas of the state have decent populations of the bird.

Seasoned turkey experts often call them, simultaneously, the smartest and the dumbest birds in the woods. Someone once said they are the only forest creature walking around like they're on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Benjamin Franklin supposedly suggested the wild turkey be named our national bird; but, of course, the bald eagle garnered that honor.

Norman said he has seen turkeys do some things that question their intelligence, but notes their survival



©Ken Perrotte

Spring turkey hunting puts you into the woods at one of the best times of the year, with cool, crisp mornings and renewal all around you as blooming redbuds, dogwoods, and other trees and shrubs awaken from the grays of winter.

"In the real world, yelps can be imperfect," Chris Parrish said. "The best callers are the ones who can make calls that cause the hair on the back of your neck to stand up—the ones who sound like a real turkey," he added.

skills are probably not related to IQ. More likely is that they survive due to keen senses and a tendency to be suspicious of most things that don't look natural.

This trait is also why many newcomers to the turkey hunting game fail miserably—heck, why many experts fail miserably. A hunter's first

few hunting seasons are usually most memorable for the countless screw-ups.

Let's look at a few common mistakes: calling too much or not calling enough; making the wrong call at the wrong time; calling too softly or calling too loudly; flushing birds off the roost or shutting them up from gobbling by trying to sneak in too close; not setting up close enough ... Seeing any patterns here?

Don't forget hunting unfamiliar terrain or not positioning yourself where the turkey could most likely be induced to travel. Turkey hunting snafus are legendary.

Some gobbler hunting novices learn the hard way, punctuated by advice they get from watching videos or reading. You can learn this way,

but it's like trying to teach yourself how to play guitar. Until you sit down and strum alongside someone who plays better, you rarely jump to the next level.

Norman, who admits learning how to turkey hunt by trial and error, recommends finding a mentor.

"Ask a successful hunter if you can tag along and watch and listen to what happens. Every bird and every hunt are different; there are no hard and fast rules for success. Patience is the key," Norman said.

Another option is to hire a guide and pick that person's brain at every opportunity. One axiom you're likely to hear over and over is that patience kills more turkeys than anything else.

"I hear soooo many hunters complain that birds gobble on the roost, fly down and, then, nothing," Norman explained. "The key to success here is to be patient. More than likely, that gobbler is with hens and you'll be lucky to call him away from them or even catch up to them. However, a lot of hens leave the gobbler at mid-morning to lay eggs and gobbling often picks up. So take a nap, explore or whatever, and wait for 9 a.m. Birds that are gobbling at mid-morning are the best birds to hunt. Chances are they're alone and easier to call," he added.

Let's Talk Turkey

The most successful hunters are bird-brains—in the best sense. They have enough experience to get inside the turkey's head and understand its motivations. They also have the skills to then influence its behavior.

One of the most intriguing and enjoyable aspects of spring turkey

hunting is actually carrying on a dialogue with the gobbler. Knowing when and how to call can be critical in at least bringing the bird into gun range. From there, your set-up and stealth become paramount.

Missourian Chris Parrish dominated national turkey calling competitions for several years, but even though he could make all the re-

(continued on pg. 16)



©Ken Perrotte

Virginia Turkey Trends

The "Turkey Status Report" compiled by the DGIF details population estimates and trends among northeastern states, Virginia regions and counties. Despite some fluctuations, often due to weather and food conditions affecting breeding success and poult survival, Virginia's overall wild turkey situation is largely stable. According to the report, Virginia's turkey population was estimated to be approximately 150,000 birds in the spring of 2008, based on the assumption that 10 percent of the population is harvested in the spring gobbler season. Based on spring gobbler harvest reports, turkey populations in Virginia appeared to peak in 2002 and, then, stabilize.

Gary Norman, the Department's turkey program manager, said he has seen a number of positives over the past decade, including the expansion of fall hunting seasons into counties that previously did not have fall seasons, the addition of special youth hunting opportunities during the fall and spring gobbler seasons, and improvement in overall population levels after adjusting the fall season from 9 to 6 weeks.

The fall season was adjusted after data showed many hens were being taken incidental to late season deer hunting. Preserving additional hens helped offset negative impacts on nesting success in the spring.

Norman also sees challenges in sustaining interest in fall turkey hunting, especially as deer seasons expand with the increased use of muzzleloaders and crossbows.

He also cites challenges with maintaining turkey brood habitat on national forest areas and the issue of habitat loss due to development and subdivision of large tracts of land.

"The George Washington National Forest is currently revising its land management plan and management of forest clearings for turkey broods, and timber management in general for food, brood habitat, etcetera," he said.

He encourages turkey hunters to contact national forest managers and ask them to support turkey management efforts.



©Ken Perrotte



Getting a gobbler to sound off to the coaxings of his friction call is just part of the thrill for avid hunter and Alabama native Harlan Starr, a member of the National Wild Turkey Federation's board of directors.

©Ken Perrotte

Calling Tips

Past National Grand Champion turkey caller Chris Parrish offers these calling and set-up tips.

- When yelping with a mouth call, drop your lower jaw just as a real turkey does. To a gobbler, it'll sound like a much more motivated hen.
- When a gobbler is heading away from you with an old hen, mock the old hen, irritate her, get her to come looking for you. She'll usually troll that gobbler behind her.
- Don't use hen cackles in the spring. Hens usually cackle in the fall.
- When you hear or locate a turkey, take time to scan the area, if possible. How and where you set up on a gobbler can make a big difference on whether he comes to your call or not. Make it easy for him; get as close to him as you can before you set up.
- Rhythm is the most important part of calling. Each turkey's voice is different, so learn to mimic the rhythm of each.
- Spend time in the woods, or purchase a CD with live turkeys on it. Turkeys are your best teachers.
- Get comfortable with your calls. No matter what types of calls you choose, be confident with your ability to use them. This includes locator calls, such as crow and owl calls.
- Once a gobbler is excited and gobbling, try going totally silent. The bird might hang up, but often he'll be there within three to five minutes. If the turkey hangs up more than 60 yards out where it can't see you, with minimal movement, softly rake the leaves at your side to mimic the sound of birds searching for food.



©Tommy Kirkland

Preparation Tips

Turkey hunting, like many outdoor pursuits, gets more specialized each year. You can spend an incredible amount of money on calls, clothing, special vests, guns, and ammo. You can even buy shotguns specially designed for turkey hunting.

Setting up a favorite wing-shooting gun for turkey hunting, though, can be simple and cost a fraction of what buying a separate "turkey gun" will cost.

Invest a little extra time identifying what combination of tight choke, shot, and sights delivers the best shot pattern. It can mean the difference between being just a well-equipped hunter or a well-equipped successful hunter.

Retired Army Col. Bruce Elliott, former Fredericksburg, resident and consummate turkey hunter, explained, "The key when turkey hunting, unlike pointing a bird or waterfowl gun, is that you're aiming and shooting more like you would a rifle. You absolutely need the point of aim and point of impact to be the same.

"Look for pattern density and pattern uniformity. There shouldn't be any holes in the shot pattern. Finding the best combination of shotshells and choke tube for turkey hunting is just like shooting a rifle—you have to find out what your gun likes the best. Each gun has its own personality," he said.

To help with accurate aiming, try adding removable sites, such as Truglo Magnum Gobbler Dots to the rib on the barrel of your shotgun. Some of the new red-dot aiming sights, such as the Burris Speed Bead, are expensive, but they'll almost ensure the pellets will hit whatever the dot is covering.

"If you're not absolutely sure of your gun's aim, just being off an inch or two at short ranges will cause you to miss with today's loads and tight chokes," Elliott said. The pattern just doesn't have the distance to open up.

©Ken Perrotte



Ken Perrotte relishes a hard-won early spring tom from the comforts of his front porch. Each time out is a learning experience when it comes to turkey hunting, and the misses and mistakes make the successes all the sweeter.

quired calls with virtuoso skill, he said imperfection carries the day during hunting.

That's a good thing because few hunters are perfect callers.

"Uh, oh, hear that? If you'd done that in a contest, you could write your ticket home," he said, pausing a video after one female caller issued a scratchy yelp. "She made a big mistake."

The audience chuckled because the female on tape was an actual hen turkey filmed as she wandered through the woods. Parrish was showing footage of real turkeys talking in natural settings in an attempt to show that the successful turkey hunter doesn't have to be nearly as perfect as the competition turkey caller.

"In the real world, yelps can be imperfect," he said. "The best callers are the ones who can make calls that cause the hair on the back of your neck to stand up—the ones who sound like a real turkey," he added.

Parrish slipped the call into his mouth and demonstrated a yelp that had some intentional nuances in it that human judges would consider flawed.

"I've never had a gobbler score me low on that call. We need to listen more to the hens and not worry about the gobblers," he said.

Although waterfowl hunting and even deer hunting—to an extent—employ calling, Norman said nothing compares to striking up a dialogue with a gobbler.

"It's terribly exciting, almost addictive," he declared. "The adrenaline rushes and your heart rate peaks when everything is right and a big tom comes gobbling into your set-up. I've hunted about every critter in the regulation book and there are none, **none**, as exciting as a spring gobbler." □

Ken Perrotte is a King George County resident and the outdoors columnist for the Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star newspaper.

Unexpected Harvests



Writer, educator, and
culinary adventurer
Vickie Shufer advocates
for the wild foods
of Virginia.

By Beth Hester

The simple, astonishing splendor of the redbud tree in full bloom is one of the loveliest harbingers of springtime in Virginia. The casual spectator, admiring the color-burst, may be unaware that the pinkish-violet, or fuchsia blooms provide nectar for bees and butterflies, and that the seeds offer forage for birds. Native and medicinal plant expert Vickie Shufer sees all of these characteristics and more. Vickie explained, "Did you know that the flowers of the redbud are edible? They have a tangy flavor, are full of vitamin C, and are great when added to salads and omelets. Slightly later in the year, the tender, flat pods resemble small snow peas, and are delicious when stir-fried."



©Vickie Shufer

Redbud seed pods (*Cercis canadensis*)



©Vickie Shufer

False Solomon's seal
(*Smilacina racemosa*)

Whether bud, blossom, seed or leaf, native plants hold four-season interest for Vickie, who since 1979 has lived in Virginia Beach, designing and conducting nature programs and working as a consultant to various state and local environmental agencies. A Kentucky native, Vickie holds a B.S. Degree in Outdoor Recreation from the University of Louisville, is a certified outdoor instructor for the Department, and has completed advanced training courses in the areas of field ethno-botany and medical botany. A Renaissance woman, she co-authors guides to Virginia's rivers and coastal waterways, leads wilderness survival programs for all age groups, and facilitates weekend interpretive programs exploring maritime forests and marshes. She also publishes the quarterly newsletter, *The Wild Foods Forum*.

In her 'test kitchen' Vickie invents recipes using the wild foods she harvests; when her pantry gets full, she hosts wild foods dinner parties. She's an enthusiastic and congenial guide, presenting native plants in all of their multi-dimensional wonder, sharing how they can be used to nourish, heal, and in addition, aid survival when the unexpected occurs.

In mid-winter 2008, I interviewed Vickie at her home near the Pocaty River. As morning sunlight filtered into her kitchen, she poured me a mug of home-brewed Yaupon-Chai tea and gave me a tour of the wild foods stored in paper sacks, baskets, and in a collection of jars on her windowsill. In the afternoon, we talked as we hiked through the 16-acre tract in Gibbs Woods, where she has started a native nursery and botanical sanctuary.

What led you to become interested in studying wild, native plants? Did anything in your background drive your sense of vocation?

I grew up in rural Kentucky, on a tobacco farm, down near the Mammoth Caves area. It was about as 'country' an existence as you could possibly imagine, and our living conditions were primitive in the extreme. We were a large family, and ten of us lived in a four-room house,



©Beth Hester



©Beth Hester



Vickie Shufer (l) invents recipes using wild foods collected both at home and on her journeys across Virginia.



with a woodstove, and no running water. I was always running around outside, exploring my surroundings, often taking a book into the woods where I could be alone and read. Native foods were part of that whole experience. I remember discovering persimmons, wild grapes, and walnuts, all there for the gathering.

I remember thinking how wonderful that was. Since I teach outdoor survival skills, I'm often asked if I go into the wilderness deliberately to practice survival ... I tell them I don't have to ... I practiced surviving for the first 18 years of my life!

How do those early experiences, combined with your extensive educational background inform your approach to teaching others about the value of wild and native plants?

I begin by encouraging students to appreciate the beauty of the natural world, and I like to stress that it's impor-

tant to begin the process by learning to identify the plants that grow right outside the front door. Knowing that a good many of these plants can be used for food or medicine, and appreciating how settlers and native peoples used them, deepens the experience. I also accommodate different learning styles. I try to appeal to the taste buds by demonstrating how to incorporate wild foods into everyday menus.

As I've traveled around Virginia facilitating various programs, it has become evident to me just how hungry people are for information about the natural world, and interest is growing. Some people may think that exploring native plants or sources of wild food is a niche hobby, or is peripheral to their lives, but I can tell them about the five-year-old girl who survived a week in the wilderness after her grandfather died from a heart attack during a fishing trip. Whether through instinct, or semi-formal instruction, she knew how to identify something edible. When they found her, she was a little dehydrated, and was grasping a fistful of raspberries. She lived to tell the tale.

The unexpected is always a possibility: boy or girl scouts can get separated from the group. Hunters and anglers can take a wrong turn, or encounter a bout of extreme weather. I know that in some parts of the Dismal Swamp, compasses don't work very well, and folks can get lost. Knowing what is safe to eat can literally mean the difference between life and death.

Could you talk a bit about some wild and native plants that might be of interest to readers of this magazine?

Several come to mind. The native, yellow thistle for example. It's common in

(continued on pg. 21)



Yellow thistle (*Cirsium horridulum*)

Persimmon Cake

- 1 box vanilla cake mix
- 2 cups persimmon pulp
- 1/4 cup butter or oil
- 1/4 cup maple syrup

Mix ingredients. Pour into baking dish and bake at 350°F for 30-35 minutes.

Persimmon Icing

- 1 box vanilla icing mix
- 1 8 oz. package cream cheese
- 1/4 cup persimmon pulp

Blend ingredients until smooth. Spread over cooled cake.

Ground Cherry Salsa

Several species of ground cherries grow throughout Virginia in sunny fields and gardens. All are edible when ripe. They are easily identified by their papery husk, which turns brown when the fruits are ready. Depending on species, the fruits may be yellow, red, or orange and can be used in the same way as cherry tomatoes.

- 1 1/2 - 2 cups ground cherries
- 1 chili pepper
- 1 green pepper
- 1 clove garlic
- 1/2 small onion

Remove cherries from their husks and cover with water. Cook on medium heat until they are soft, but not bursting (about 10-15 minutes). Put in blender. Add chopped peppers, garlic clove and onion. Blend.

Yaupon Chai Tea

- 1 cup yaupon leaves
- Enough water to cover and steep

Remove leaves from branches and spread on cookie sheet. Roast in 350°F oven until dry and crumbly (about 20 minutes). Cover with boiling water and steep for 15-20 minutes. Strain and enjoy! You may want to add maple syrup, honey, or ginger root according to your preference.

Acorn Griddle Cakes

- 1 cup acorn meal (make sure acorns are mature and harvest-ready)
- 1 cup pancake mix
- 1/2 cup yogurt
- 2 tbsp. melted butter
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 tbsp. maple syrup

Mix ingredients thoroughly. Drop batter by spoonfuls onto hot, oiled griddle or frying pan. Fry on both sides till golden brown.



Above: Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*)

Below: Red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*)



Vickie's Foraging Tips

- ◆ Avoid foraging in areas such as parks or wildlife refuges. Some plant species are rare, or are protected. Consult with on-site staff first.
- ◆ Before transplanting, establish that the plant in question will be non-invasive in your area.
- ◆ Never harvest or eat plants from fields that have been recently sprayed with pesticides.
- ◆ Ingest only those plants, nuts, and fruit that you can positively identify.
- ◆ Take only what you need: leave some plants to re-seed, leave some for wildlife, and also for other foragers.
- ◆ Reduce waste by properly storing wild foods and medicinal plants.
- ◆ Teach children to identify poison ivy and other causes of dermatitis.

the spring, and many people take the plant for granted, or they consider it trash. But if you like celery, cut the thistle off at the base before the plant blooms, and before the first flower bud opens; peel the stalk, and you'll never want to buy celery from the store again. The thistle stalk is juicier, and sweeter. False Solomon's seal, the berries of which the indigenous people gave to the settlers to ward off scurvy, is noteworthy. Crab apples are high in pectin, so it's easy to make a jelly from them.



©Beth Hester

A grinding stone is useful for mashing acorns and other nuts.

Acorns from the live oak are incredibly good. They don't have an inordinate amount of tannin in them, and therefore can be used in the late autumn when they are mature. I shell them and grind them up either in the blender or on the grinding stone that was found on the property. I make griddlecakes from the resulting meal.

Lastly, I would encourage Virginians to be mindful of the native hazelnuts so common in our piedmont region. They're abundant if you get to them before the critters do, and they are more flavorful than the imported nuts with which we're so familiar.

You have recently started Wild Woods Farm, a 16-acre native nursery. What plants can be found there, and what plans do you have for the farm going forward?

I'm excited about the educational possibilities this land will be able to offer as it develops. The front half of the property is mostly loblolly pine, red maple,

sweet gum, and tulip poplar; the back half is an older, more mature area with oak, hickory, and beech trees predominating. My ultimate goal is to propagate wild, native plants, make them available to people, and conduct educational tours and programs on the property when permanent trails are established.

The property has been through some pretty heavy-duty changes, but those changes are instructive. First hurricane Isabel came along, bringing down lots of trees and generating debris on the forest



©Vickie Shufer



©Vickie Shufer

Top: Ground cherry (*Physalis pruinosa*)
Above: Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)

floor. Six weeks later, a fire swept through, burning off a lot of the rubble and helping to make the soil a rich, fertile ground where seeds could germinate. As a result of these events, there is a greater diversity of plant life. Shrubs, ferns, and wildflowers are thriving due to the increased sun-

light on the forest floor. Some of my favorite plants are the Indian cucumber root, dwarf trillium, trout lily, heart leaf ginger, and partridge berry.

When young and tender, the trailing wild bean can be cooked up and served just like regular green beans.

What counsel do you have for people who want to begin to explore wild foods and incorporate them into their meals?

You don't need a ton of expensive gadgets to get started. I use an old-school food mill to process persimmons, grapes and berries ... anything with a pulp. A good quality food dehydrator is a boon in our humid environment, and it's especially useful for fruits, and for those plants like the *Salicornia*, or salt plants that tend to retain moisture. Finally I use a steam juice extractor. It takes out the seeds which can impart a bitter, woody taste to juice.

I want to encourage people to explore the hidden treasures of our natural areas. Reading the landscape as the seasons change sharpens observational skills. When folks begin to focus on the plants that grow wild, something else happens ... they also begin to notice the animal tracks and other signs of wildlife that exist nearby. For me, it's extremely gratifying to play a role in encouraging people of all ages to engage with nature on a more intimate level. □

Beth Hester is a writer and freelance photographer. When not hunched over her laptop, she pursues other passions: reading, shooting, kayaking, fishing, tying saltwater flies, and tending her herb garden. She lives in Portsmouth.

Additional Resources

- ◆ The Virginia Native Plant Society – State Office: VNPS, 400 Blandy Farm Lane, Unit #2, Boyce, Virginia 22620. www.vnps.org
- ◆ The Wild Foods Forum newsletter – P. O. Box 61413, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23466-1413
- ◆ www.ecoimages-us.com – Vickie Shufer's Web site, which contains a schedule of educational opportunities, a bibliography, thumbnail photographs, and mini-biographies of edible and medicinal plants.

Be a Habitat



Carol Heiser



Carol Heiser

Creating habitat is more than just hanging bird feeders.

By Carol A. Heiser

Our connection to nature runs deep. Famed biologist E. O. Wilson calls this connection “biophilia,” or “the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes.” When we sit on a bench in a garden surrounded by greenery, bask in the sun and watch butterflies float gently among flowers, we unconsciously feel a certain kinship that calms and restores us. We’re ‘hard-wired’ to respond this way.

“To the extent that each person can feel like a naturalist,” Wilson sug-

This homeowner has done an excellent job of replacing a large portion of lawn with ground-covers, shrubs, and perennials that support a diversity of birds, insects, and other wildlife.

gests, “the old excitement of the untrammelled world will be regained.”

Yet, in so much of the modern environment, we have managed to overlook that fundamental connection and have replaced our natural surroundings with artificial—some would say sterile—landscapes. We either clear, pave over, replant with exotic looking non-native species, or otherwise diminish the ecological value of outdoor spaces.

At the same time, we have pushed aside or permanently removed many of the native plant and animal communities that used to thrive on the land. Woodlands, meadows, and wetlands are often reduced to small patches or remnants after the primary development footprint is carved out. Wildlife is left with a woodlot here, a muddy puddle there, and acres and acres of lawn.

Be creative in your use of garden elements tucked among groupings of native plants. This small, recirculating jug of water provides a quick sip for songbirds.

Partner!®



Carol Heiser



Carol Heiser



Carol Heiser

A habitat at home is an oasis of many different plant types that can serve multiple functions. **Above:** The homeowner installed a green roof over the porch and completely replaced all turfgrass—what a contrast to the neighbors! **Left:** Tight spaces on a slope are filled with flowering plants that hold the soil and require little maintenance.

Look for vertical spaces to improve habitat. If you don't have room for a vine over a fence, use a trellis instead, and plant a native species like this trumpet honeysuckle, which attracts hummingbirds.

Habitat at Home®

How do we recapture our connection with nature, improve the landscape for wildlife, and restore—if only in part—some microcosm of the natural ecosystems we've lost? The answer is surprisingly simple: If you're going to build, minimize the amount of vegetation and water sources removed; if it's already built, plant more habitat and add water features.

Habitat in the places where we live can take the form of a small flower garden in a side yard dotted with shrubs, a collection of potted native plants on a balcony, or a half-acre drainfield planted with perennials and grasses. Habitats can be big or small, depending on your site and your budget.



Carol Heiser

Install a small water feature in the ground, and who knows what will show up? The above is only a 3' x 5' insert, but salamanders still found the little pool and laid these egg masses. Frogs, dragonflies, and other critters will also delight; they'll eat mosquito larvae, too.



Schoolyard Habitat

Habitat improvement projects can provide essential, nature-based amenities at schools, too, where children spend a large portion of their formative years. In Richard Louv's landmark book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, he describes a panoply of childhood ills that can in part be explained by our apparent alienation from nature. Louv writes the following about this disconnect:

Our society is teaching young people to avoid direct experience in nature. That lesson is delivered in schools, families, even organizations devoted to the outdoors, and codified into the legal and regulatory structures of many of our communities. Our institutions, urban/suburban design, and cultural attitudes unconsciously associate nature with doom—while disassociating the outdoors from joy and solitude . . . But as the young spend less and less of their lives in natural surroundings, their senses narrow, physiologically and psychologically, and this reduces the richness of human experience.

Since a child's relationship with and connection to nature are shaped largely by early, positive experiences in the outdoors, we can provide these connections quite effectively on a daily basis by establishing and maintaining habitat gardens in local schoolyards.



An extensive habitat blankets a large portion of the schoolyard at Daniel's Run Elementary in Fairfax. The habitat's proximity to play areas makes it an ideal place for students to explore and interact with nature. Teachers use these gardens to teach Standards of Learning.



Wetland Studies and Solutions, Inc. in Gainesville is an exemplary model of corporate habitat success. The green roof seen here captures and treats rainwater, which significantly reduces the amount of runoff entering nearby creeks. The site also boasts a bioretention swale and permeable paving, all designed to get water back into the ground.

Corporate Habitat

For most people, when we're not at home we're usually... at work. Does your place of employment have an open space near the employee entrance, or a large empty lawn, or perhaps a small outdoor area that might be used when folks are on a break? The work place can be a great site to install a wildlife habitat.



Let Habitat Partners® Certify Your Site

Whether your habitat project is large or small, you can show your support of Virginia's wildlife by applying for a free Habitat Partners® certificate from the Department (www.dgif.virginia.gov/habitat). The certificate is available for residences, businesses, or schools. Once your site becomes certified, you may then apply for a free Habitat Partners® sign to display on a fence post, entranceway, or other prominent location for visitors and passers-by to see.

The application is an outline that helps describe important habitat features you've improved, such as native plants that were installed to replace non-native ones; water features placed in the ground to supplement bird baths; and protective cover provided in the form of additional shrubs, brush piles, or nest boxes.

When is a "Habitat" Not a Habitat?

Notice that in all our descriptions of wildlife habitat we have greatly downplayed the presence of feeders. Having 10 feeders and a bird bath in the middle of a sea of lawn is not a habitat. True, a "feeding station" is a great way to bring birds and small

Instead, install a couple of water features and surround them with groundcovers, flowers, shrubs, and small trees. Add a fallen log or brush pile and a nest box or two.

And remember, too, to make time to immerse yourself, as often as possible, in the beauty of a habitat garden. Naturalist John Muir once wrote, "Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out ... that wildness is a necessity." We can reconnect with the outdoors starting in our own backyards, where touching nature close to home "makes all the world kin." □

Carol A. Heiser is a wildlife habitat education coordinator at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.



A rain garden is a great way to break up the monotony of a large lawn and improve water quality at the same time. Here at the Product Development Office of Wyeth Consumer Health Care in Richmond, the garden was installed with pathways and an inviting bench. Employees at Wyeth volunteer their time on a wildlife habitat committee.

mammals closer to windows for us to see and appreciate; but the best habitats are those which have water sources available to a variety of wildlife species and an abundance of natural food sources like berries, seeds, and nectar from a diversity of plant types. Feeders are only incidental to the habitat equation.



Volunteers install a wetland buffer around the edges of a stormwater retention pond at Union Bank Shares in Caroline County.

Digging Deeper

Books

Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens, by Douglas W. Tallamy; 2007, Timber Press, OR.

Natural Landscaping: Gardening with Nature to Create a Backyard Paradise, by Sally Roth; 1997, Rodale Press, PA.

The Natural Habitat Garden, by Ken Druse; 2004, Timber Press, OR.

Gardening with Nature, by James van Sweden; 2003, Watson-Guptill Publications, NY & Grayson Publishing, DC.

Designing Outdoor Environments for Children: Landscaping Schoolyards, Gardens and Playgrounds, by Lolly Tai et al.; 2006, McGraw-Hill, NY.

Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder, by Richard Louv; 2005, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, NC.

Schoolyard Habitats: A How-To Guide, 2001, National Wildlife Federation, Reston, VA.

Web sites

- *Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping, Chesapeake Bay Watershed*, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (84-page booklet with color photos of recommended plants): www.nps.gov/plants/pubs/Chesapeake/toc.htm
- *Better Backyard: A Citizens' Resource Guide to Beneficial Landscaping and Habitat Restoration in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed* (61-page booklet): www.chesapeakebay.net/pubs/781.pdf
- Habitat Partners® Web pages of the VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries: www.dgif.virginia.gov/habitat

Habitat at Home® DVD Available

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has produced a new DVD that illustrates several types of home habitat gardens. For a copy of the DVD (\$12), visit our online store at www.HuntFishVA.com or call (804) 367-2569 after April 15th.

Scouting +

essay and photos by Gail Brown



One hundred years is a long time to keep a promise; yet, this year at Blue and Gold dinners and candlelit ceremonies across the commonwealth, Virginia's scouts will celebrate the Boy Scouts of America's first century of promises kept and good deeds accomplished. By 2012 the Girl Scouts of America will reach the same milestone—100 years of working to improve the lives of others.

While scouting always plays an important role in our communities, the standard for civic involvement reached an incredible height in Woodstock, Virginia, when, in 2007,

Central High School (CHS) graduated ten Eagle Scouts—an amazing statistic even for Virginia Naturally schools with much larger populations.

What does this level of involvement mean to this Shenandoah Valley community? An eagle-eye view of their individual and collective efforts reveals the impact their dedication to service continues to have on the neighbors. As former scout leader and CHS science teacher Chris Kaznosky stated, "We have several troops represented at Central High. Typically, our scout troops work together to get projects going; it would be unusual for scouts or troops to work alone ... these Eagle Scouts, many of whom entered kindergarten together, were no exception."

"Scouting makes boys aware of the outdoors, and, in turn, they develop a love of it," stated Lisa Currie,

parent, scout leader, and Shenandoah County School Board member.

DGIF wildlife education coordinator, girl scout leader, and mother of an Eagle and a Gold Award Scout, Suzie Gilley concurs: "Scouting teaches an appreciation of the outdoors. Troops participate in a variety of environmental service projects each year. They are our future conservation leaders."



Matt Perry and friends in Troop 700 worked to improve this ball field.



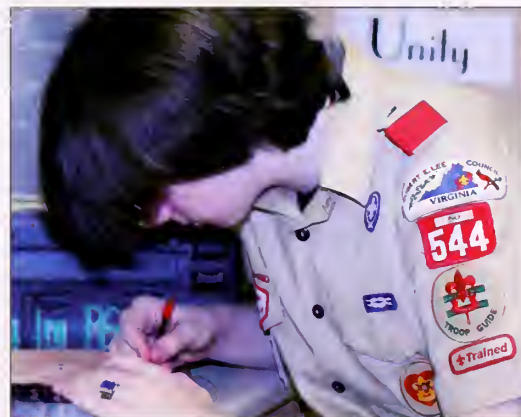
Girl scouts, Troop 1172, wrote letters as kindergartners to support Poquoson's efforts to build Oxford Run Trail; they planted and maintained their school's gardens.

Virginia Naturally Schools = Fun!

Projects completed by the scouts from Troop 88 and Troop 575 that led to Eagle Scout status include: installing a shed, fencing, landscaping and playgrounds at area churches; organizing and moving a library; assisting a library in securing Internet services; constructing a privacy fence around a women's abuse shelter; and building and landscaping an educational outdoor courtyard at CHS.

ments. Closing the gap between the blue waters of Hawaii and the green hills of Appalachia would take considerable money, but challenges did not deter these young women. Senior year saw busy days disappear faster than thin mints at a campout as the scouts did what scouts do best: set goals and work hard.

"They must have made and sold over 8,000 peanut butter balls," said



Students at Hanover County's Elmont Elementary continue to benefit from the projects these scouts completed on school grounds.



Scouting provides opportunities for leadership skills to develop.

One scout constructed stone pillars for Shenandoah County Park in Maurertown, Virginia.

Across the state, in the equally stunning Appalachian Valley, recent St. Paul High School graduate Destinee Blevins (Troop 400) became the first woman in her service unit to receive the coveted Gold Award since 1977. Her project: raise the funds and do the work needed to refurbish a bunkhouse in an area church. Destinee found scouting helped fill a need to contribute to her community and helped her decide her career path of pharmacology.

Joined by two friends, the trio—scouts together throughout their school careers—decided a graduation trip to Hawaii would be a fitting adventure to celebrate past achieve-



For his Eagle Scout project, Ryan Puryear and fellow scouts in Troop 793 built this outdoor classroom for Elmont Elementary School.

Destinee's mom. "The girls never quit. I think scouting teaches girls life skills." And yes, the water was great.

By celebrating decades of success, we realize that the next hundred years will see scouts become the future leaders that our communities require. We promise. □

Gail Brown is a retired principal for Chesterfield County Public Schools. She is a lifelong learner and educator, and her teaching and administrative experiences in grades K-12 have taught her that project-based environmental programs teach science standards, promote core values, and provide exciting educational experiences for the entire community.





Retired Chief of Police Charlie Lawhorne oversees the annual kids fishing day he spawned in Grottoes.



Chief

pond, Chief Charlie conceived of the idea for a kids fishing day. With \$200 for prizes, the event was off and running 14 years ago. At last year's May 3rd event, Grottoes Mayor Joe Morris presented Chief Charlie with a plaque honoring his many years of service championing the event.

At the Mountain View Town Park, the first Saturday each May is known as Chief Charlie's Kids Fishing Day. Chief Charlie, the current



*"Give a man a fish;
you have fed him for
today. Teach a man to
fish and you have fed
him for a lifetime."*

— Author unknown

essay and photos
by Marika Byrd

The town of Grottoes, Virginia, annually carries out this adage as it honors retired Chief of Police Charlie Lawhorne, AKA "Chief Charlie," for his energy and dedication to the kids fishing day festivities.

According to Chief Charlie, the town purchased a 54-acre cattle farm in the event of a need to expand their sewage treatment plant. After clearing the land and finding lots of flat area for various activities and a dry

chief of police, John Painter, uniformed town deputies, a 'posse' of volunteers, and staff from the Department (DGIF), along with hordes of anxious children and their parents, amass at the town park for another annual kids fishing competition sponsored by local businesses.

DGIF conservation police officer E. W. Herndon reported that the Fisheries Division stocked about 1,000 trout in the pond to feed the voracious appetites of the young and want-to-be anglers. Coursey Springs trout hatchery manager Eric Wooding brought an extra stocking supply of trout early Saturday morning so that the kids could see the fish being

Charlie's Kids

introduced. One of the highlights of the day for a lot of the kids and for some of the parents, too, was seeing the stocking.

An estimated 300 contenders, with a parent or guardian in tow, lined up very early behind the yellow and black "Do Not Cross" police line and awaited Chief Painter's word to move to the bank. Once the competition began, he admonished parents to only help to cast and remove the

catch. The competition divisions included ages nine and under from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.; from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., ages 10-15 held forth. Folks at the 'check-in' station measured the catch and determined all winners by 2:00 p.m.

In the youngsters contest, double-winner Devin Deane, age eight, led with the first trout and the longest at 13.5". Malachi Lucas, age five, reeled in the largest catch of 6" in this

age division, while Haven Reed, age three, snagged the smallest.

In the 10-15 division, again a double winner was Dylan Casto with a 6" smallest and a 13.5" trout as the largest catch of the day.

John and Karena Moats like to fish a lot, but say they did not reel in any in 2008. Jacob Lilly has been fishing for only 1 1/2 months; he likes boat landings and his grandfather's property as fishing venues.

Because of limited attention spans, other educational activities were provided: a petting zoo (which had a mother miniature goat and three babies no taller than six inches, a fawn, and sheep) manned by a scout troop from Bridgewater; a town fire truck; and a 'fly-in' of a



medical helicopter. A horse-drawn, covered wagon and the Grottoes police 'troop' truck provided rides around the scenic grounds.

Chief Charlie's Kids Fishing Day is a time to engage in recreational and educational activities, partake of the food, and then go home energized. The town whole-heartedly supports the idea for a day of wholesome entertainment for its citizens by donating canned corn for bait, door prizes, and food. The police department provides loaner fishing pails and poles. □

Marika Byrd is a freelancer from Glen Allen and a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife. She is a member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association.



Journal

2009 Outdoor Calendar of Events

Unless otherwise noted, for current information and registration on workshops go to the "Upcoming Events" page on the Department's Web site at www.HuntFishVA.com or call 804-367-7800.

April 4: Trout Heritage Day

April 4: Kids Fishing Heritage Day, Graves Mountain Lodge. Starts 9:00 a.m. For more information, call 540-923-4231.

April 4: Youth Spring Turkey Hunt Day. For ages 15 and younger.

April 11: Spring Turkey season opens.

April 11: Bluebell Festival, Merrimac Farm WMA, www.pwconserve.org.

April 18-19: 9th annual Virginia Fly Fishing Festival, Waynesboro; vaflyfishingfestival.org

April 22: Earth Day

May 2: Chief Charlie's Kids Fishing Day, Grottoes.

May 8-10: Great Dismal Swamp Birding Festival, Suffolk; www.fws.gov/northeast/greatdismalswamp/.

May 9: International Migratory Bird Celebration, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge.

May 15-17: Becoming an Outdoors-Woman®, Holiday Lake 4-H Center, Appomattox. Ages 18 and up.

May 16: Spring Turkey season closes.

May 16-22: National Safe Boating Week.

May 29-31: Mountain Lake Migratory Bird Festival, Pembroke; www.mountainlakebirding.com.

June 5-7: Free Freshwater and Saltwater Fishing Days. □



by Beth Hester

Remarkable Trees of Virginia

by Nancy Ross Hugo & Jeff Kirwan. Photography by Robert Llewellyn. 2008 Published by Albemarle Books-434-973-8000

Distributed by University of Virginia Press - www.upress.virginia.edu ISBN: 978-0-9742707-2-2

"Our strongest impression after four years of focusing on trees and their habitats, is that a landscape rich in trees is no longer something Virginians can take for granted. Urbanization and other pressures are too strong for us to assume we will have trees by default. If Virginia is to continue to have trees and tree places ... it will have to be by design."

Around 400 million years ago, the first recognizable trees appeared on Earth. With root networks reaching mysteriously into the soil, branches silhouetted against the sky and stretching toward an unknown heaven, it's easy to see why early cultures developed complex myth cycles based upon certain iconic trees. Biologically, aesthetically, and some might say, spiritually, it could be argued that trees are our most valued life partners.

Author Nancy Ross Hugo, forestry professor Jeff Kirwan, and photographer Robert Llewellyn spent over four years traveling around Virginia, discovering and documenting the hidden history behind some of our most significant trees. Launched in 2004 as the Remarkable Tree Project, a Web-based site enabled Virginians to submit their fa-

vorite trees for inclusion in a keepsake manuscript. Over 1,000 trees were nominated, and approximately 100 appear in this volume.

Ross Hugo acknowledges that the term "living witness" is almost unavoidable when describing trees, so momentous are the events that have unfolded beneath their canopies. For example, The Brompton Oak in Fredericksburg, was captured in a haunting Matthew Brady photograph, war-weary soldiers resting beneath its branches. A tulip-poplar planted by Thomas Jefferson graces the grounds of Monticello, and a 300-year-old osage orange presides over Patrick Henry's last home, at Red Hill in Charlotte County. The rings of one particular tree provide insights into the survival of our earliest settlers.

In addition to historic trees and physically noteworthy species, this document records important community trees, like the spectacular sugar maple in Sperryville's town center, and the gnarly red mulberry in Henrico County. The photographs are stunning, and there is enough hard science and folklore to keep things interesting in the accompanying text.

There are mighty oaks, a shagbark hickory, cucumber magnolias, and sweetgum. In short, more of Virginia's considerable trees than you can...well...shake a stick at. What is really remarkable, is the passionate coordination of will that brought the efforts of such organizations as the Virginia Tech Department of Forestry, Trees Virginia, 4-H clubs, and the Virginia Forestry Educational Foundation to bear upon this project. Lush and scholarly, this hardback is a real treasure. It celebrates the inner lives of our arboreal partners, while stressing the necessity of their continued presence in our lives. □

Wounded Warrior Spring Turkey Hunt

On April 11th, the Virginia Hunter Education Association, in conjunction with the DGIF and Nansemond River Baptist Church, will hold its 2nd annual Wounded Warrior Spring Turkey Hunt. The first one, held in the small community of Whaleyville in Suffolk County, was such a success that a second was deemed a natural occurrence. Rob and Cindy Zepp will again host the event at their farm, and with the help of the many volunteers and sponsors, this year's hunt will be even more successful.

Last year's hunters came from different branches of the service as well as eras of service: from the Korean Conflict through to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The men were excited about what was to come and were not disappointed from the moment they 'touched down' at Rob and Cindy's to the final 'dust off' when, with teary eyes, a "See ya later" was passed around. As to the number of birds taken that day, only one was recorded. But from the smiles of all who participated, you would have thought everyone had checked one in.

This year's hunt will be no less exciting. If the sponsors and volunteers who pledged their support are any indication, the scale of this event will surely be grand. To the vendors and volunteers who did participate last year, we would like to say, "Thanks for your tireless efforts." We hope we can count on you again this year.

Anyone wanting to help out or donate can do so through the Virginia Hunter Education Association at www.vahea.org.

This report was contributed by hunter education instructor J. C. Gaitley, III.

Clarification

The "Upland Game Bird Trail" guide printed in the February 2009 issue included only hunting preserves open to the general public. We regret any confusion caused.



Secretary of Natural Resources Preston Bryant and his wife, Liz, were on hand to kick off the new monofilament fishing line recycling program. Standing with the Secretary and his wife are DGIF Executive Director Bob Duncan (L) and Marine Resources Commissioner Steve Bowman (R).

Outdoor Kids



Congratulations to Annabelle Buckles, who had a banner fishing day on the Holston River this past August. She shows up her dad, Allen (in the background), with a catch of smallmouths and blue cats.

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by Ken and Maria Perrotte

Dining In

Wild Turkey Jambalaya

Many who haven't ventured into Cajun country or restaurants featuring that uniquely-styled, spicy fare likely have their entire knowledge of jambalaya informed by the hit song by the late Hank Williams, Sr., who reportedly adapted an old Cajun melody with some new words. To Hank's credit, jambalaya does match well with sharing a bowl of gumbo, crawfish pie, and good times with a "cher amio" (girlfriend, boyfriend, spouse).

Jambalaya can be cooked in small batches indoors or in big pots over an outdoor flame. It is one of those 'one pot' meals and is said to have been derived from paella, reflecting the Spanish influence over southern Louisiana.

Cooking should be enjoyable and adaptable to individual tastes; it is fun to experiment with jambalaya. The shrimp in this recipe can be omitted. Chicken, pork, or even oysters can be added or substituted. Beef stock can be swapped for chicken broth. More or less vegetables or garlic can be used and the cayenne pepper can be revved up for a hotter dish. The rice needs some fat to coat it during the cooking process, so at least one of the meats should yield a little fat to help out the butter.

Other than the 'work' invested in getting and cleaning your wild turkey, jambalaya is also a relatively inexpensive dish to prepare and seems to taste especially good when you're having an outdoor affair in the spring or fall.

Jambalaya pares well with a tossed salad, some crusty French bread, and a wine such as a Pinot Gris, Riesling, a light fruity red, or even a dry champagne. But, you'll never go wrong with beer and jambalaya. Some vegetable dishes that go well as sides are steamed asparagus (add a Hollandaise sauce adorned with a few crawfish tails or shrimp pieces) or a green bean dish, such as a casserole.

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 2 cups chopped onion
- 1/4 cup chopped green pepper
- 1/4 cup chopped scallions
- 1 tablespoon garlic
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped parsley
- 1/2 pound smoked sausage
- 1/2 cup chopped ham

- 2 cups wild turkey breast, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 bay leaf, crushed
- 1/4 teaspoon thyme
- 1/8 teaspoon cloves
- 1 1/2 cups rice
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 1/2 pound peeled shrimp

Melt butter in a large pot over medium-low heat. Add the onion, green pepper, scallions, garlic, parsley, and smoked sausage. Cook for about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add ham, turkey, and seasonings. Cook another 5 minutes. Add the rice and broth. Raise heat and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for about 40 minutes or until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed, stirring occasionally, but do not stir so much or overcook that the rice gets mushy. If all liquid is absorbed before rice is tender, add more broth. If rice becomes tender and the mixture still has liquids, remove cover and continue cooking for about 5 minutes or until liquid is absorbed. Mix shrimp into the jambalaya and cook until pink. Serves 4 with ample helpings. □



Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

Whose Digital Photograph Is This?

The importance of adding your name and other key information to your digital images.

Last December, we reviewed hundreds of photographs for the annual photography competition, most of them digital files. When it came time to narrow our selections we kept running into one problem. Most of the digital entries did not have the photographer's name listed anywhere within the file's metadata.

Metadata is information embedded in a digital photo file. This information stays with the image wherever it goes. Camera settings such as ISO, aperture, and shutter speed are automatically recorded into the photograph's metadata, but other information, such as the photographer and the location where it was shot, is not. This is something you have to add.

It was very frustrating to have to look around for the original paperwork every time we wanted to find out something about an image we were judging. Why weren't photographers including pertinent information in their digital files?

My guess is that most photographers just don't know how useful it is or how to do it. An earlier "Photo Tips" column addressed the importance of including your name and other information within such digital files. In that column, I mentioned that, as digital photographers, you should *always* embed your name and other important details in your work!

Here is how it's done. When you process your digital images, you use an image editing software program provided by either your camera manufacturer or another company, like Adobe. These programs not only offer the ability to lighten, darken, crop, and further manipulate your images; they also offer you a way to add necessary information to your photo files.

For example, in Photoshop CS3 first open up a digital image, and then look under "File" at the top left of your screen and go down and click on "File Info." File Info will open a menu that offers you options for adding data to your files and allows you to view data already there. Looking closer at the File Info screen, you will see "IPTC Contact." This option opens a window where you can enter your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, and Web site. The information you enter in this screen and then save will be embedded in that image file. To save time, you can save this contact information into a template which can be re-used with other images later.

Under "Description," on the left where you located "IPTC Contact," you can add information in that screen about the image (what it is, where it was photographed) as well as copyright status and notification. This, too, can be copied into a template for re-use later. And... you

don't have to individually save information to individual photographs! You can batch images and embed the information in as many photographs as you'd like all at once! This is where templates become very handy.

So, no more excuses! Make a photography contest judge or a magazine editor happy today! Use the File Info feature in your image editing software, and Happy Shooting! □

You are invited to submit one to five of your best photographs to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send original slides, super high-quality prints, or high-res 360 dpi jpeg files on disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where you captured the image and what camera and settings you used, along with your phone number. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work with the readers of *Virginia Wildlife*!

Image of the Month



Congratulations to Rockney Yobp for his awesome image of a great blue heron with a huge shad, shot at Mason Neck State Park. Rockney gets an A+ for entering his name and image description into the File Info of this image! Canon 5D digital SLR camera, Canon 400mm f5.6 lens, hand held, ISO 250, 1/400th, f14.0.

On The Water

by Tom Guess



What a Calm Night to be So Rough!

As I walked out onto the Coast Guard Station deck overlooking the mirror-like water of Milford Haven, I remember the chill of approaching nightfall and the smell of smoke from a neighbor's chimney which left me 'chomping at the bit' to get underway on the bay. There was a royal blue and reddish sailor's sky. The stars and a full moon were starting to show as I sipped my coffee through its thick steam.

February isn't normally a boating month, but there was no wind, the water was like glass, and a nip in the air let you know it would be a cold, but quiet night on the water. As I headed down to the dock to board our 25-foot SafeBoat, I was greeted by the other three members of the crew, donning their orange and black dry suits. The air temp was forecast to drop into the lower 30s and the water temp was in the mid-40s.

Nearly 90% of boating fatalities occur due to drowning, and nearly half of those are attributed to the effects of cold water immersion. Cold water cools a body 25 times faster than air of the same temperature. If the water temp drops below 50°F, the window of opportunity for rescue is only a few minutes.

After going over our pre-underway checklists, we left the station, heading out to the bay through Milford Haven and under the Gwynn's Island swing bridge. It was standard practice to leave the cabin door open so that we could hear outside. Seagulls called out to us as we passed the Narrows, as if to ask why we were out on such a cold night.

Shortly we made the right turn into the Piankatank; I started to bring the boat up on a plane and ap-

proached cruising speed for our trip across the bay to the Eastern Shore. We headed out through the river's entrance buoys and into the Chesapeake. The moon was reflecting off the water, causing sky and water to become lost at the horizon. The only way to differentiate between the two was during the passing of an occasional dead-rise or tug and barge.

As we crossed the main shipping channel that met the Rappahannock Shoal Channel near the Eastern Shore range lights, one of the crewmembers reported a huge, slow contact off the starboard bow. It was a 600-foot car carrier, or PCC! Pure Car Carriers are ships that haul cars by sea. I decided to do a radar plot on the ship and found it was making 20 knots (or 23 mph).

Since the car carrier was in the main shipping channel and closing fast, I decided to turn back toward the range lights and let it go by before we made our transit across the channel. I did this for two reasons: first, to let some of the new guys marvel at

the size and height of the approaching ship; and second, to let them appreciate the full impact of what 50,000 gross tons of steel will do to the water's surface.

Once the car carrier passed, I quickly turned my bow into the relative direction of the shipping channel and held position. I told the crew to hold on tight since we were going to be met by a sizeable wake. And quite the wake it was at approximately 5 feet, followed by a series of 4 or 5 waves in a row!

While we were well prepared for the wake, the same situation could be tragic for a less experienced boater. When you're boating, be aware of all inherent dangers, especially those you may not routinely think of. Outside forces can have serious consequences that may quickly turn your uneventful trip into a very rough one—even on such a calm night. □

Tom Guess serves as the statewide coordinator for the Boating Safety Education program at the DGIF.



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2009 Kids 'n Fishing Photo Contest

- ◆ Children in the picture must fall into one of the following age categories when the picture is taken: 1-5 or 6-10.
- ◆ Photos should not be more than one year old and must be taken in Virginia. Only one photo per child featured as subject.
- ◆ Photos must be postmarked no later than June 20, 2009. Attach name, age, address, phone number, and fishing location to the back of the photograph. Please do not write on the back of the photographs.
- ◆ When in a boat, kids must be wearing a life jacket.
- ◆ You must submit a Photo Contest Release Form along with your photograph. Check www.HuntFishVA.com for release form and complete contest details.
- ◆ Send entry to 2009 Kids 'n Fishing Photo Contest, VDGIF, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.